1. Introduction

This chapter charts various ways that religious persons and groups can be perpetrators and victims of epistemic injustice. Religious persons and communities can commit, or can suffer, epistemic injustices. Miranda Fricker, for instance, mentions religion as a ‘dimension of social activity’ that prejudices could track but does not focus upon it (2007, 27). A religious identity can invite others’ prejudice and entail activities and experiences that others might find difficult to make sense of, while also shaping a person’s epistemic sensibilities. The practices of testifying to and interpreting experiences take a range of distinctive forms in religious life – for instance, if the testimonial practices require a special sort of religious accomplishment or if proper understanding of religious experiences is only available to those with authentic faith. But it is also clear that religious communities and traditions have been sources of epistemic injustice – for instance, by conjoining epistemic and spiritual credibility in ways disadvantageous to ‘deviant’ groups. I explore the ways that epistemic injustice and religion can interact and focus mainly on the major monotheistic religions that are culturally dominant in the modern West.

2. Epistemic injustice and theologies

The literature on epistemic injustice and religion is modest and mostly represented by the work of the eminent feminist philosopher of religion, Pamela Sue Anderson (2004, 2012). She focuses on ways that gendered prejudices in Western religious traditions has damaged the spiritual development and self-understanding of women. The epistemic aspect of these critiques lies in the erosion and distortion of the testimonial and hermeneutical credibility and confidence of religious women. The transposition of gendered stereotypes into the epistemic practices of theism can and has excluded women from religious discourses, which, if left unchecked, corrupts the concepts, symbols, and other epistemic resources of the religious imaginary, a concept Marije Altorf (2009) adapts from Michèle Le Doeuff (1989). If a religious woman lacks the confidence and credibility needed to articulate and make sense of her experiences, then she suffers a spiritually-toned epistemic injustice.

A striking feature of Anderson’s more recent work on epistemic injustice are potent criticisms of the ways that the practice of mainstream philosophy of religion might promote certain forms.
of epistemic injustice. A sensitivity to gender, race, ‘epistemic location’, and an expansive engagement with the many forms of religiosity are needed for just understanding of ‘thinking subjects’, and religious persons, who are marginalised epistemically and socially within the academy (see Anderson 2012, 2015). It is too soon to tell whether philosophers of religion will engage with the ethico-epistemic issues that Fricker’s concept captures, but one can look elsewhere for work exploring their relation to religion. The trick is to not to look for discussions couched in Fricker’s own terms, but rather for the sorts of concerns and topics they track. One can talk about epistemic injustice without using that term, and lack of a term ought not to be confused with lack of sensitivity to the underlying phenomenon.

Several significant movements in theology engage with issues of epistemic injustice, and I consider two – feminist and liberation – in detail, making occasional remarks on queer theologies along the way.

At their broader, the many varieties of feminist theology share a concern to identify and reconstruct gender prejudices in religious thought and practice. Its relation to epistemic injustice turns on the conviction, voiced by the late Rita Gross (2002, 63), that ‘adequate theology cannot be done on the basis of erasing many voices’, such as those of women and aboriginal peoples. Feminist theologies explore the fact that the institutional and intellectual structures of many, if not all, religions are shaped by androcentric biases, in different ways, at different levels. For a start, women may be characterised negatively in the relevant terms in a religious tradition, perhaps as earthly or bodily, or as loci of craving and desire, even if the characterisations are more nuanced and less fixed than was once supposed (Coakley 2000). If a dominant theological anthropology assigns to women a derogatory status, then the very possibility of their enjoying epistemic credibility and authority is denied or impugned. Next is the related promotion of overwhelmingly male religious exemplars, often coupled to explicit denial that women are apt for religious exemplarity, although this varies by tradition; there is, for instance, a long Indian tradition of men recognising, indeed esteeming, female spiritual exemplars (Frazier 2009). If, in a religious culture, epistemic and spiritual status are connected, then to deprive women of religious exemplarity in effect deflates their credibility and authority, at least in religious matters.

If there are general ways that religions could generate epistemic injustices, there are other ways peculiar to distinctive traditions. One is that theistic traditions can conceptualise God or the divine using typically masculine terms, like power or reason, thereby presenting a conception of epistemic authority defined relative to men. Such conceptualisations project a sexist social order onto a transcendent reality, explicitly or not; for instance, the Wisdom tradition of Hebrew Scripture insisted that God is beyond gender, while the Church Fathers denied that woman was theomorphic, able to ‘image’ God (Ruether 1990). Another specific way to impose epistemic injustices onto women within a religious tradition is to privilege the use of gendered language, metaphors, and images in quotidian and theological discourse – a default to the male pronoun for God, ‘the Father’, say. And another would be nomination of women as the sources of epistemic and spiritual corruption, whose best example is likely the Christian postlapsarian doctrine by which Eve is the ‘embodiment of sin and corruption’ (Yee 2003, 1).

Feminist theologies offer at least three ways to understand the unjust epistemic effects of entrenched religious sexism. The first is to show the silencing of the experiences, thoughts, and reflections of women of spirit, not least their accounts of their marginalisation in and by the traditions to which they belong – a theme reflected in the subtitle of Ursula King’s influential collection, Women and Spirituality, Voices of Protest, Voices of Promise (King 1989). Second, to document and protest occlusion of the social and spiritual experiences of religious women, including the ways they are ‘shut out of theological reflection’ (Ruether 1983, 13) and denied a role in the ‘formation of . . . theological meaning’ (Loades 1990, 4). And third, feminist theologies offer
powerful ways to identify and interdict systems of doctrinal and social power that deprive religious women of their epistemic authority — for instance, by detailing the ‘disastrous’ effects on Christian women’s ‘self-understanding’ of their tradition’s ‘fundamentally ambivalent’ conceptions of the moral and metaphysical status of women (Loades 1990, 2). These systems must also be sensitive to the intersections of gender and race (see Armour 1999).

Alongside such critical ways, constructive projects for a diversification of our conceptions of religion and theology can be offered. Though a standing concern of feminist theologies, positive projects are clear in the efforts by queer theologians, such as Marcella Althaus-Reid, to create ‘a new space for a theological dialogue for and from heterosexual dissenters’, able to exploit theological insights latent in the ‘elements of consciousness’ of their ‘loving relationships’ (2003, 4, 115), which offer new ‘discourses of the sacred’ (2000, 3). This requires overcoming the credibility deficits and hermeneutical marginalisation imposed on queer religious communities, a project whose relationship to ‘orthodox’ theologies is highly contested (see Cornwall 2011).

I suggest that epistemic injustice is a deep, latent theme in feminist and queer theologies. A religious life is only possible if one can engage in testimonial practices and draw upon rich hermeneutic resources within an epistemically nourishing tradition. But such abilities to participate in those practices and access those resources can be corrupted by a variety of prejudices, generating testimonial silencing and smothering (Dotson 2011), and hermeneutic marginalisation. If so, such corrupted traditions perpetrate epistemic injustices that prevent women and others of being able to report and make sense of their spiritual experiences.

**Liberation theologies**

Early critics of feminist theologies called attention to a neglect of other marginalised social and religious groups, insisting that the ‘struggle for justice for women’ ought be extended to the ‘liberation of humankind’ (Grey 1999, 89). Perhaps the most influential manifestation of this call is the ‘liberation theology’ movement that emerged in the Latin American Catholic Church in the 1970s. True to its Marxist inspirations, ‘liberation’ has social and economic as well as epistemic aspects, of which two stand out. The first is a profound association of epistemic and material oppression, of a sense that effective oppression of people requires restriction of epistemic opportunities, for education, criticism, and debate. Second, a more theologically charged conviction reflected in the title of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s 1986 book, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, taken from John 8:32. The aspects converge in a conviction that epistemic and spiritual oppression are mutually reinforcing, since enforced failures to create and share in truth and knowledge are spiritually deleterious. Crucially, however, social and economic realities in modern societies ensure that this afflicts the illiterate poor more than a literate elite. If so, argues Gutiérrez, theological thought and practice should make epistemic justice a central aim — not the abstract grasp of ‘cold, warehoused truths’, but liberatory actions with truth and love as their ‘criteria for discernment’ (1986, 102, original emphasis).

The tacit ambition of epistemic justice is warranted by appeal to the epistemic lessons of Jesus’ own ministry, devoted to tending and attending to the marginalised. At the heart of liberation theology is the positive promotion of an ‘ethical and intellectual orientation’ towards those people and groups ‘marginalized by and within theology’ (Rowland 1999, 3). The related critical aim is to encourage materially and epistemically privileged theologians to revise what Kwok Pui-lan describes as their ‘suspicion’ of those on the social and theological ‘margins’ (2005, 126). If so, there are two ways that liberation theology engages issues of epistemic injustice. One is drawing attention to the social, material, and theological structures that marginalize the testimonies and
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experiences of certain religious groups, or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak dubs the ‘itinerary of silencing’ (Spivak 2013). Such efforts include interrogating established theological economies of credibility, taking seriously marginalized voices, and cultivating a virtuous willingness ‘to listen and to be challenged and to respond’ (Noble 2014, 9). Second, liberation theologies can show the fruits of more epistemically just modes of theological practice and how they ‘liberate’ previously occluded forms of religious experience and understanding. Interestingly, this is presented not as an ideological intrusion into Christian theology, but as an overdue realization of its latent imperatives – hence why many liberation theologians quote Jeremiah 22:13–17, ‘To know God is to do justice’, in its fullest spiritual, material, and epistemic senses.

The conjunction of epistemic and spiritual liberation is also evident in other religious traditions as feminist, postcolonial, and queer insights flowed through other traditions. A systematic study could focus on religious movements alert to (i) the articulation of the latent epistemic aspects of religious concepts of justice – particularly in Judaism (Stone 2004) and Islam (Shaikh 2013) – and (ii) the appreciation of the ways that prejudices distort judgments of epistemic and spiritual credibility and authority within the historical and current forms of those traditions. A promising possibility is Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of satyagraha, built from Hindu materials, that promotes both personal ‘insistence’ on truth and the creation of social and epistemic conditions receptive to its acquisition and debate – ones unmarred by gender and caste prejudice, for instance. In effect, this is a call for epistemic justice, rooted in a religious tradition noted for its entrenched syncretic and pluralistic tendencies (see Gandhi 1996, part I, Parekh 2001).

3. Religion as a source of epistemic injustice

A vigorous literature exists devoted to the epistemic, as well as moral and social, harms that can be generated by and within religious institutions and traditions, criticisms often offered from their own members. Can these criticisms be articulated in the terms of epistemic injustice?

**Religious aliens**

Paul J. Griffiths (2010) defines a ‘religious alien’ as anyone who seems to inhabit a religious form of life that one does not take oneself to inhabit. To a nonreligious person, all religious people are aliens, as theists are to atheists, while to a religious person only the people who inhabit a different form of life are religious aliens, as Sikhs do to Zen Buddhists, say. Griffiths describes a set of ‘families of responses’ to them, including ‘domestication’, ‘shunning’, and ‘love’s embrace’, each of which can be analysed using the concept of epistemic injustice. It is clear, for instance, that our responses to religious aliens invoke complex questions of testimonial and hermeneutical engagement of sorts that bring the possibility of injustice. Are religious aliens negatively stereotyped – as godless, profane, or pagan – in ways that are credibility-deflating? Do religious people have the hermeneutical practices and resources needed to be, as Griffiths (2010, 123) says, ‘receptive to the . . . alien’s particular otherness’? Can one even regard aliens as epistemically credible if their conception of reality is regarded as metaphysically and spiritually false or flawed?

Such questions invoke complex issues of epistemic injustice, confidence, and power that are ripe for systematic investigation. A good starting point would be Anderson’s (2015) work on feminist perspectives on religious diversity and the discussion of how aliens can provoke crises of epistemic confidence in one’s tradition offered by Griffiths (2001, chs. 2–3). Those less sympathetic to religious concerns might also consider the ways that non-religious aliens were, historically, epistemically stigmatised. During the Middle Ages, atheism was an indisputable ‘sign of ignorance’ and ‘immorality’, such that listening to them was a tangible risk to one’s moral and
spiritual integrity. If so, testimonial and hermeneutical injustice may sometimes be latent in a whole culture or picture of the world (see Weltecke 2013).

**Christian mysticism**

Feminist philosophy of religion affords rich materials for studies of epistemic injustices that were facilitated and legitimated by religious traditions. Grace Jantzen offers the case of the marginalisation of women in the Western Christian mystical tradition in her influential book *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*. To retrieve and ‘celebrate’ those women mystics is to contribute to the feminist project of ‘deconstructing patriarchal paradigms’ that led to the occlusion of their testimonies and experiences (1995, 3, 347). It is also to challenge modern philosophical approaches to mysticism that continue that legacy of marginalisation, not least by reactivating debates about ‘who counts as a mystic’ within cultures averse to the idea of women having an ‘authoritative’ status. If women mystics’ experiences were accepted, then their attainment of union with God would undermine their spiritually derogated status and force a ‘reconsideration of the categories’ of spiritual and social order (Jantzen 1995, 2, 15, 16). The women’s testimonies and experiences could transform the entire religious imagination.

Jantzen’s study of the gendered injustices perpetrated against women mystics in the Christian medieval tradition is complex and has been contested. \(^3\) But it addresses the issues definitive of epistemic injustice, such as the hermeneutical marginalisation of certain groups, for instance, and the abuse of social power to distort credibility economies. Similar themes are developed by Sarah Coakley, who recently argued that analytic philosophy of religion has tended to ‘trivialise’ the ‘epistemic significance’ of St. Teresa of Avila’s mystical experiences. Although she does not explicitly invoke the concept of epistemic justice, it flows through her suggestion that, by taking lessons from feminist thought, philosophers of religion can ‘do richer justice hermeneutically to the texts of mystical theology’ (2009, 283).

**The soul-making theodicy**

The project of theodicy has been subjected to morally inflected criticisms that offer another possibility for detecting subtle forms of epistemic injustice generated by religious traditions. I focus on the soul-making theodicy, developed by John Hick in *Evil and the Love of God*, and the epistemically-inflected criticisms of it developed by moral anti-theodicists.

The core claim that Hick develops is that experiencing and engaging with suffering is necessary to the cultivation of moral and spiritual virtues. Since God desires our perfection, He places us into a world whose abundant suffering makes it an optimal environment for the exercise of those virtues – a ‘vale of soul-making’. Influential as it is, the theodicy is criticized on many fronts, but I focus on objections of a feminist character.

Marilyn McCord Adams (1999) is perhaps the most famous critic of the soul-making theodicy, challenging its central claim by arguing that certain human experiences of suffering are so terrible – extensive and intensive – that, as Hick puts it, they ‘crush [one’s] character’ (2010, 330–331). Such ‘horrors’, as Adams dubs them, not only ‘fail to advance’ the sufferer’s moral and spiritual ‘progress’, but are so ‘damaging’ that progress becomes ‘virtually impossible’ (1999, 53). Indeed, such ‘horrors’, far from being soul-making, are irrevocably soul-breaking – a religiously-inflected form of what José Medina calls ‘epistemic death’, that occurs as a result of harm to one’s epistemic capacities and agency, ‘so deep as to annihilate one’s self’ (see Medina 2017, 108).

If certain experiences of suffering result in ‘epistemic death’, then that is one way to base a critique of the soul-making theodicy in epistemic injustice. But two others are worth mentioning.
The first arises from Hick's appeal to *mystery* as a response to horrendous evils (which he calls ‘dysteleological evils’). The deep problem of evil, he argues, lies in the fact that evils and suffering are ‘distributed in random and meaningless ways’, for which we can provide no rationally and morally compelling explanation (2010, 333). Although Hick invokes such ‘mysteriousness’, arguing that it is conducive to the process of soul-making, the claim is false and – I argue – a source of epistemic injustice. It is false because the distribution of evil and suffering is not ‘random’, but obviously socially and materially conditioned. Evils track individuals and groups along the lines of sex, gender, race, and social-economic situation, in the case of both natural and social evils. If the distribution is explicable, it is not mysterious – a point obvious from historical and sociological investigation, and neglected by philosophers of religion who, as Morny Joy (2010) complains, talk blandly and vaguely of how *people* suffer, rather than admit that certain groups of people – women and the poor, say – suffer more intensely and extensively from evils, including group-specific evils (like female genital mutilation), and are also less able, socially and epistemically, to protest and interdict their suffering. If epistemic injustice is a sort of evil, then its distribution is not ‘random’.

An appeal to mystery, of the sort Hick offers, is a source of epistemic injustice in two ways. First, it is apt to distract attention away from the empirical realities of suffering, not least the social identities of the sufferers, thereby occluding the testimonies and experiences of the sufferers by removing any sense that it is relevant or imperative to attend to them. It adds silencing to the experience of suffering, hence the ‘refusal’ of feminist philosophies of religion to ‘distract attention’ away from the social identities and voices of the suffering (Jantzen 1998, 264). Second, appeal to mystery tends to divert intellectual attention away from concrete empirical realities onto a transcendent domain, usually to speculations about God’s reasons for allowing evil. This has the hermeneutical consequence that *understanding evil* becomes a task of abstract theorizing rather than sensitive engagement with the lived experiences of the sufferers (see Burley 2012a). Understanding evil becomes a matter of ratiocination informed only minimally by an empathetic engagement with the testimonies and experiences of sufferers – a criticism that is central to *moral anti-theodicy*, which emerged, over the last fifty years, to challenge styles of theodicy judged to encourage morally opprobrious forms of detachment from, and insensitivity to, suffering. Moral anti-theodicy has a latent epistemic aspect, closely related to concerns about injustice. D.Z. Phillips, for instance, argued that theodicies ‘betray the evils that people have suffered’, and thereby ‘sin against them’ (2004, xi). Among its aspects, this ‘betrayal’ includes a failure to assign a central role to the testimonies of those who suffer – a betrayal by silencing. Indeed, a grim irony is that suffering is silenced by the very people who confidently assume the task of making sense of the experiences of the suffering. Theodicies, as critics put it, are complicit in ‘dehumanising victimization without reconciliation’, objectionable insofar as it ‘averts its gaze from the cruelties that exist in the world’, including the human perspectives of those living those cruelties (quoted and discussed in Trakakis 2008, ch. 2).

Theodical projects can be sources of epistemic injustice if they fail to encourage the development of the resources and sensitivities needed to attend humanely to the testimonies of religious people of their experiences of suffering. If so, such projects will, however inadvertently, be epistemically unjust.

### 4. Religion and vulnerability to epistemic injustice

Debates about the epistemological status of religion in late modern societies are arguably shaped by two background convictions – inherited from the Enlightenment, operating at the level of a *sensus communis*, rather than explicitly affirmed doctrine. One is that religious belief is
epistemically suspicious, reflective of ignorance, superstition, or of the persistence of a set of psychosocial needs. Another is that religious beliefs, institutions, and traditions have been and continue to be epistemically deleterious at the individual and social levels – a claim that is developed and explored by political theorists, cultural critics, and many others. If so, then religion is liable to be interpreted as the source, not the victim, of epistemic injustices. These are deep waters – historically, culturally, intellectually – and there is little work on the ways that the concept of epistemic injustice could be used to navigate them.

Certainly the central concerns captured by the concept of epistemic injustice can be found in influential recent works, including Charles Taylor’s recent study, *A Secular Age*, that interprets modern secularism in terms of a change in the prevailing ‘conditions of belief’ of modern societies. Religious belief, once ‘axiomatic’, is now ‘one . . . possibility’ among others, ‘eligible’ for some, but not for others, such that different groups within a culture ‘experience their world very differently’ (2007, 3, 14). Such contexts complicate judgments of credibility and interpretation because epistemic possibilities that are crucial to one group are ruled out by another – for instance, if talk of a sense of love of or union with god can only be heard as symbolic or expressive at best, or ‘outmoded’ or literally senseless at worst, then there is a space for epistemic injustice (see Cottingham 2005, ch. 6, Kidd 2014). Or religious groups might be negatively stereotyped in ways that prejudicially deflate their credibility or find the activities and experiences constitutive of their faith rendered hermeneutically opaque within a religiously illiterate society (see Anderson 2013, Svartvik and Wirén 2013). Or the non-religious social peers might not only be ignorant of basic knowledge – of doctrines, dietary rules, and so on – but also have a hermeneutically inadequate approach to religion.

Contemporary philosophers of religion of many different stripes nowadays advocate richer ways of making sense of the diversity of forms of human religiosity – historical, cross-cultural, and phenomenological, for instance (see, *inter alia*, Burley 2016, Wynn 2005, Zagzebski 2007). Underlying such work is a call for an enriched hermeneutical sensibility of a sort that relates to what Fricker calls epistemic injustice – for instance, an appreciation that ‘taking a religious belief seriously’ means locating it within a ‘form of life’, rather than isolating it from its supporting context of thought and sensibility, thereby consigning it to unintelligibility. This is difficult if the beliefs and practices seem absurd or unintelligible, but the virtue lies in seeing that such appraisals are products of a contingently inherited sensibility, rather than exercise of an epistemically privileged perspective on reality (see Burley 2012b).

The idea that our contingently inherited epistemic sensibilities can act as deep sources of epistemic injustice is a complex one – sketched, in part, by Kidd (2013) and Ratcliffe (2008, ch. 10). But the idea is best explored in the context of religion where epistemological issues are complicated by the very fact of significant differences in how human beings experience and conceive the world.

**Naturalism and religious experiences**

The deep roots of epistemic injustice are usually contingent prejudices against certain social groups – women, blacks, the disabled, and so on – that are explicable in psychosocial terms. But a further possibility, at least in the case of religion, is that the roots of such injustice can be something akin to a worldview or conception of reality. Certainly certain philosophers of religion have argued that certain religious claims and experiences are deprived of credibility and intelligibility by a naturalistic worldview (see, for instance, Cottingham 2005). Central to that worldview – or set of related views – is a denial of the existence of supernatural entities and realities – gods, soul, karma, and other components of many religious ways of life. Since they are
judged not to exist, belief in them must be evidence of epistemic fault, usually to be explained in the terms of psychological and evolutionary terms (see De Cruz and De Smedt 2015, Dennett 2006).

Most cases of epistemic injustice involve deficiencies of epistemic goods – credibility and intelligibility – that stem from negative prejudice or lack of hermeneutical resources. I want to suggest that, in certain cases, the very possibility of credibility or intelligibility is removed, and that this can result from adoption by an epistemic agent of a certain worldview. Call this a deep epistemic injustice and consider as an example the project of ‘spiritual neuroscience’, which used to be called ‘neurotheology’. Critics make various empirical and methodological objections to such projects, but a deeper worry is that spiritual neuroscience presupposes a naturalistic framework that implicitly rules out certain epistemic possibilities – specifically, it rules out the possibility of a veridical interpretation of religious experiences, of their being what their experiencers report and interpret them to be.

Although ‘religious experiences’ is a broad and elastic one, within religious communities it is typically taken to refer to some sort of experience of absorption in, union with, sense of or a something whose reality is not only denied but also excluded by a naturalistic picture of the world (see Katz 2012). But, as David E. Cooper argues, such a picture necessarily ‘denies truth or sense to . . . such experience[s]’ and ‘entails that the experience cannot be taken at face value’ (2002, 337–338). If so, people who adopt it are de facto prevented from regarding as credible any testimonies to such religious experiences that are regarded, at least if they are interpreted to be, inter alia, perception of a divine being, ‘union’ with the ‘grounds of being’, or whatever. In such cases, the person’s credibility is not deflated, but definitively denied, at least concerning those experiences.5

The idea of deep epistemic injustices of this sort is contestable, of course, because it depends on fundamental metaphysical convictions. Naturalists will likely reject talk of their illegitimately ruling out the possibility of veridical interpretations of religious experience by denying that they are legitimate. If the blunt fact is that there are no transcendent realities, then rejecting reports of experiences of one is not an injustice, but what informed scientific reason requires. Yet the critics’ response will be to reject the naturalistic confidence in that picture of the world; perhaps, like the later Wittgenstein, they think Weltbild cannot be proven or refuted, since any practices and criteria of proof and refutation would presuppose the very picture whose status is being questioned. Or perhaps they follow the position of the existential phenomenologists: that naturalism takes for granted a tacit sense of reality that it cannot epistemically justify (see Ratcliffe 2003, 2013).

Since exploration of the points of contact between epistemic injustice and the deep philosophical issues sketched here is in its early days, these remarks are necessarily brief. It is striking, though, that those who develop them evince a consistent concern with issues of our testimonial and hermeneutical capacities. Ratcliffe argues that neurotheologians fail to grasp that their commitment to methodological naturalism, their ‘definitive refusal’ to admit theistic possibilities into scientific enquiry, entails implicit ontological commitments, that are ‘antagonistic to theism’. Confident in its own sense of neutrality, neurotheology ‘implicitly rules out the possibility of certain coherent, theistic ontological claims’ (2003, 234, 327). The epistemic consequence is that the naturalist cannot but withhold the possibility of credibility and intelligibility from people’s reports of religious experiences, which will be naturalised and pathologised (see Kidd 2017). If one agrees with the critique of the naturalism, then this may seem like a case of deep epistemic injustice – a denial of the possibility of testimonial credibility and intelligibility to those who report experiences incompatible with a naturalistic metaphysics. But naturalists, of course, will reject the critique and hence the charge of deep epistemic injustice.
Since the possibility of deep epistemic injustices will ultimately turn on a larger debate about philosophical naturalism, it is best not to hold one’s breath for solutions. But it does point to the potential fruits of exploring cases where religious persons might feel that they are victims of epistemic injustice. Certainly we can use it to pose interesting questions. Is it a testimonial injustice to deny credibility to religious persons who report experiences of a sort that, though profoundly significant to them and their communities, can only be found incredible (in a technical, literal sense) by others? Is it a sort of hermeneutical injustice if the education and culture of secular societies fail to provide their members with the sensibilities and resources needed to make sense of religious people’s experiences? Is epistemic justice a political and civic virtue within modern societies where a premium is placed on debate and understanding between diverse religious and non-religious communities? And if our pictures of the world fundamentally structure our sense of what sorts of testimonies and experiences can be regarded as credible and intelligible, then is there a deeper – ‘metaphysical’ – aspect to the possibility of epistemic justice in the context of religion in modern societies? A sense of what sorts of experiences can be credibly reported and cogently made sense of may be rooted in a picture of the world. But this may be a vision some social peers may not share; indeed, one that many may regard as absurd.

5. Conclusions

This chapter has surveyed several points of contact between epistemic injustice and religion. Although this study is in its very early stages, there are rich existing resources within various forms of theology – feminist, liberation, and queer – and various current debates within the philosophy of religion and wider philosophical thought. One can think of religious doctrines, communities, and systems of thought as sources of epistemic injustice, or one can think of religious agents as victims of epistemic injustice; or – of course – one can recognise that the options are mutually compatible and consider both together. There are various possibilities available, and given the epistemic and cultural complexities attending religion – in its widest sense – in modern societies, there should be great interest and urgency in exploring them.

Related chapters: 1, 2, 3, 10, 18, 22, 26, 33, 34

Notes

1 This is a large theme, explored by, among many others, Daly (1973), Ruether (1983), and Schüssler Fiorenza (1993).
2 See ‘Reading Spivak’, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean’s introduction to Spivak (2013), for useful context and criticisms of her work.
4 A disturbing example of a morally obnoxious hermeneutical failure in the context of religion is discussed by Medina (2012, §4.2.1).
5 I give a fuller account of how adoption of a naturalistic stance can occlude a person’s capacity to engage epistemically with religious claims and experiences in Kidd (2012).
6 I am grateful to José Medina and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. for comments on an earlier draft, to Rachel Muers and Tasia Scrutton for encouraging my early interest, and to David E. Cooper and Matthew Ratcliffe for inspiring my ideas.
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